

# READING TO LEARN PROGRAM TO TEACHING CRITICAL WRITING IN ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSE CLASS

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## **Abstract**

*This study reports the effectiveness of using Reading to Learn program in teaching critical writing to teacher candidates in English Language Teaching Department, Sampoerna School of Education, Jakarta. The Reading to Learn program implemented in this study allows the researchers to employ principles from other theories to do with critical thinking and critical literacy important to the study. Embracing the characteristics of a case study and to some extent a program evaluation research design, data in this study were obtained from classroom observations by the two researchers, collection of samples of students' texts in various stages of the teaching program and students' journals written after each teaching session and interviews with the student participating in this study conducted immediately after the teaching program completed. The results revealed that students' ability to write an English text is better than before indicated by their ability to clearly and explicitly explain details of information in the text they write which surely fulfill the standard outlined in the critical thinking theory used in this study.*

**Key words:** *Reading to learn program, writing, critical thinking*

## **Introduction**

Recently, there has been wide interest in integrating teaching reading and writing. It is because reading and writing in English as a Foreign language have been claimed to be difficult for students (Gibbons, 2002). Therefore reading integration is conducted since it provides benefits to EFL learners' writing performance (Tuan:2012). Rose (2005) named the methodology as *Reading to Learn*. It is an educational concepts to create a sequence of carefully designed strategies for scaffolding students' reading and writing of narrative and factual texts from across curriculum learning areas.

Rose et al (2005) have implemented

the program in Koori Centre programs and the result shows that there is improvements in students' academic reading and writing skills. In addition, they are more willing to explore issues in both class discussion and written assignments. Rose and Acevedo (2006a) mentions that they have successfully implemented *Reading to Learn Program* for Middle Years of Schooling (5-9) by the Catholic Education Office Melbourne. The program has been able to accelerate the literacy development of "at risk" learners, and close the gap between the most and least successful learners in their schools..

Inspired by the success of the previous research, the current study was conducted to implement *Reading to Learn Program* for EAP 1 students majoring in

English and Mathematics Education. The students are lack of critical writing skills due to the limitation of vocabulary, generic structure of the text, critical thinking skills and grammatical knowledge. This program is intended for scaffolding the students so that they will be able to read and write academic text independently.

## Literature Review

### Reading to Learn Program

Learners who have problems in reading are mostly incapable of writing. Therefore, Escibano (1999) has noted that including reading in teaching writing becomes an important pedagogical instrument which may be the basis for successful academic writing courses. Krashen (1989) also states that reading exposure supports the view that it increases not only reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition, but it improves gram-

matical development and writing style. Thus, Rose has designed *Reading to Learn* program in order to integrate reading and writing.

The program is based on three core principles (Rose and Acevedo, 2006b). Those are reading is very important for primary and secondary school, students should be taught the same level of skills in reading and writing and students will learn when teachers provide activities that support them to succeed at the same high level.

Furthermore, the *Reading to Learn* Curriculum Cycle to be applied in this study is more detailed compared to the *Genre Based Approach* which is so far used by many teachers. Therefore, this teaching approach (the Reading to Learn Program) can be seen as complementary to the *Genre Based Approach*. Stages of teaching and learning from the *Reading to Learn* Program perspective as developed by Rose, 2008 and Rose and Acevedo, 2006a can be

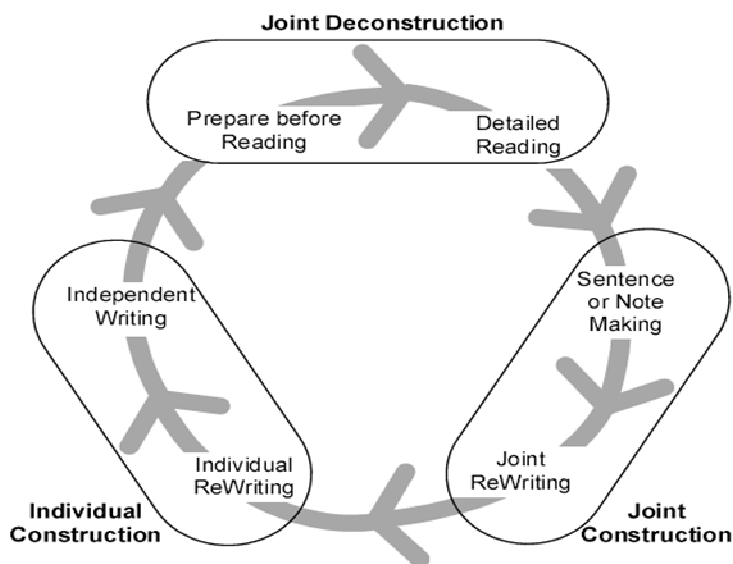


Figure 1. Reading to learn cycles

### The Relationship between Critical Thinking and Writing

It is mentioned in the literature that there is a close relationship between criti-

cal thinking and writing. The relationship between the two has been taken up by many writers such as Chaffee (2000) and Fisher (1990). Chaffee (2000), for example, said that writing is the most important

seen in figure 1. He further stated "writing thoughtfully involves thinking critically as you move through the process of writing so that you can express your ideas effectively" (p. 7). These show that thinking and writing are two interactive processes.

The relationship between thinking and writing is also argued by Reichenbach (2001) who said "writing is a means that assists us in making ideas of our own, in clarifying our opinions or beliefs, and in sorting out the evidence we have for thinking our beliefs are true". This has also been stated by Paul (1993) who also argued that critical writing promotes critical reading and critical thinking. This is similar to what Fisher (1990) believes about the two. To him, "the ability to read and write, encourages a more abstract form of thinking.

In line with those theorists mentioned above, Anderson (1998) also believes that students' critical thinking could be improved through an argumentative writing. He says that through an argumentative writing, the students can learn to influence others and practice to arrange ideas in a logical order. Skills in argumentation both spoken and written, as it is known, has been considered as one of critical thinking dispositions (Ennis, 1987) and argumentative writing has thus been considered to be critical to challenge students' critical thinking (CT). Bizzell (1992) as quoted by Emilia (2005), argues that arguing by means of writing could lead the students to be more critical. To Bizzell, by writing an argument in a written form, there is a possibility for others to question. This shows that an evaluation of one's argument takes place. Thus, a critical thinking as a reciprocal process occurs.

From the perspective of CT movement, critical writing is critical thinking applied to the process of writing (Chaffee et al, 2002). This suggests that critical writing is a careful, active, reflective, analytic writing.

## **Research Method**

### **Participants**

Twenty students EFL freshmen participated in the study for four weeks. They were enrolled in the English Language Teaching Department (ELT) and Mathematic Department (12 ELT and 8 Math). The students level was at intermediate. The students were taking English for Academic Purposes 1 and the course focuses on Reading and Writing.

### **The study**

This study employed a qualitative research design, embracing characteristics of a case study and to some extent a program evaluation because in this study the researchers created and implemented a teaching program. In this context, during the course of the study, the researchers evaluated the value and the effectiveness of the program through ongoing assessment of students' achievement relevant to the objectives of the program

### **Instruments**

Data in this study was obtained from four sources including interview that was given after the teaching program; classroom observations by the two researchers, collection of samples of students' texts in various stages of the teaching program which were analyzed using systemic functional grammar (SFG) as developed by Halliday and Mathiessen (2004) and students' journals written after each teaching session.

### **Data collection and analysis**

In terms of data analysis, in this study the data analysis was conducted over the course of the study. Ongoing data analyses and interpretations was based on the data from interview, diagnostic writing prior to the teaching program, students' journals and observation notes. Moreover, data analyzed after the teaching program was mainly students' writing samples and interview data. As pointed out by Travers (2001), the proce-

ture of text analysis in case study follows the procedures laid out in the related theory. For this purpose, this study used the critical thinking theory and Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) to analyze the students' writings. The analysis conducted was in terms of the critical thinking elements and linguistic features the students employed in their writings.

The analysis of students' texts writing was conducted in three steps. First step was categorizing students' writings into three categories decided before (high achiever, mid achiever, and low achiever). The second step, using systemic functional grammar (SFG), was the analysis of the logic or schematic structure, organization and purpose, and how well each element in the texts performs its function. Based on each element, those texts were analyzed in terms of linguistic features which include the textual, ideational and interpersonal metafunctions. Results of these analyses were related to the aspects of critical thinking proposed by theorists mentioned in the literature review section.

Finally, the data from interview was transcribed and subsequently categorized and interpreted to answer the research questions. During the transcription stage, students' names were replaced with pseudonyms (Silverman, 1993). In the following step, to follow Cohen and Manion, (1994) and Kvale (1996) the transcripts were given back to the participants to make sure that it is exactly what the students said and meant. The transcripts were condensed into briefer statements in which the main sense of what is said is rephrased in a few words (Kvale, 1996, p. 192). Finally, the data was coded and categorized by using thematic data analysis. In this sense, the researchers categorized students' comments into themes relevant to the objectives of the study.

## Finding and Discussion

### Implementation of Interaction Cycle in Reading to Learn Program

The goal of this section is to provide a profound picture of the implementation of interaction cycle in Reading to Learn Program in the reading class of the first semester of the English Education Department, Sampoerna School of Education, Jakarta. In this research, this used of interaction cycle aims mainly to build students' critical reading and writing an English text especially an argumentative text. For this to take place, two teaching cycles have been conducted in which various activities (including games) were given during the instruction. Details of the activities in each cycle are explained in the following sections.

#### 1.1 Teaching Cycle 1

To follow Rose (2008), in Teaching Cycle 1 of this research, five stages of teaching were conducted. This includes *Preparing before Reading*, *Detailed Reading*, *Preparing for Writing*, *Joint Rewriting* and *Individual Rewriting*. In this teaching cycle, the focus of the instruction was to build students' understanding on argumentative texts expecting that they can write a good argumentative text in the end of the teaching cycle since they have a solid knowledge about this text type. Therefore, the organization of the text and the linguistic features characterized the argumentative text were given a bigger portion during this first teaching cycle. All these are conducted as Reading to Learn approaches reading first from the perspective of genre, then the patterns in which a text's field unfolds through the genre and finally the wordings within sentences that realise these discourse semantic patterns (Rose, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007).

#### Preparing before Reading

It is mentioned in the literature that *Preparing before Reading* is a crucial stage

in a reading activity. This is done in order to help students build knowledge about the topic of the text they read by employing their background knowledge about the topic of the text as suggested by Rose and Acevedo (2006b; 2006c). In this research, to help students to understand the text given about "*the Same Sex Classes, Just in Though Years*", teacher guided the students to fully understand the text by giving some leading questions encouraging students to use their background knowledge to get a general picture of the topic. In this case, the teacher provided two pictures representing classes with both different and same sexes and asked students to opine on them. In addition, both teacher and students discussed things related to the text given especially on advantages and disadvantages of having the same sex classes. As the observation data revealed, students' general understanding of the text gives them a better sense of the text prior to their reading activity. This occurred because the students could predict the content of the text prior to reading the text itself.

### Detailed Reading

With the text given about "Separating the Sexes, just for a though Years", students were asked to highlight some difficult words which later discussed together. Some examples of difficult wordings students highlighted are *uneven pace of girls*, *same-sex classes*, *yields*, among others. In helping students to understand the terms mentioned, the teacher wrote those terms/wordings in the whiteboard and let the class discussed them together and concluded the result of the discussion. This is done by affirming students' correct answers toward the questions regarding the wordings given.

In order to get a clear picture of the text they read, the students were given a form guiding them to list some opponents and proponents statements. In doing this, the teacher guided the students in finding out the expressions by, for example, giving some leading statements or words to oppose or to encourage the separating sexes action for year 7 to 8 students. For example, the teacher explained to the students that an action verb such as *oppose* and *disagree* lead to an opponent position. Meanwhile action verbs such as *agree* and *propose* are commonly used to support an action. Doing this, students found it easier to quickly find the *pro* and *con* statements which directly help them comprehensively found the key points of the text. With regard to the use of scaffolding interaction cycle in *Detailed Reading*, the same activities were repeatedly done by the teacher for each wording discussed during this stage. All these were done to ensure that all students gained a clear picture about the topic discussed in the text.

### Preparing for Writing

Rose (2008) said that for an argumentative text, the teacher better provides the overall framework that the class will follow in writing a new text. Then, it is continued by the teacher through pointing out a few main elements of the text, such as the topic, the main points of text, the first argument, and so on. Rose (2008) also states "with these on the class board, or on butchers paper, the teacher then ask the class to brainstorm new ideas for each of these elements". What is suggested by Rose above were also implemented in the Preparing for Writing stage of this research. In this context, preparing before writing involves making notes from the text the students read in the class which is

<i>Uneven pace</i> <i>Noticeable</i>	<i>Same-sex classes</i> <i>Self-esteem</i>	<i>Opponents</i> <i>Proponents</i>	<i>Sibblings</i> <i>Federal law</i>	<i>Separate</i> <i>Squabbling</i>
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about “Separating the Sexes, just for a though Years”. In addition the students also asked to rewrite the notes they have made during the detailed reading stage as given in the following examples: Note-making on those wordings mentioned above allows the students to go over what they have learned in detailed reading, reinforcing and deepening their understanding which is surely important for the students to succeed in writing a new text of the same topic or the same type. In this stage, the students were given more explanations regarding the frame, generic structure of the text and linguistic features of the text type. This is done, to make sure that the students are ready to start writing their own text.

### Joint Rewriting

In this research, Joint Writing was done through scribing activity that is writing together a text in a whiteboard. Through this, each student was encouraged to contribute by giving ideas in the form of sentences, words, expressions and so on which is in line with the topic of the text written. The students were also en-

couraged to point back to the passage, to plan exactly how they will write each group of words in the sentence when they found it hard to write the text. During this joint writing stage, the students keep guiding the students to make sure that the writing the students created was in the frame of the original text they read before. During this stage, the students used the notes that have been written on the board which provided them a framework to jointly write a new text on the board, guided by the teacher. The teacher also helped the students by providing whatever language resources the students need and guiding the text construction.

### Independent Writing

The independent writing was done after the teacher was sure that all students have been adequately prepared for this independent task, and that it is clearly specified in the terms that have been practiced in preceding stages. In addition, the teacher also students by providing appropriate source texts and helped them to select the right ones. An example of the students’ writing can be seen in the fol-

### Example of student text

*“the Same Sex Classes, Just in Though Years”,*

The topic of separating sex classes is controversial. The argument holds that brain of males and females develop differently. Proponents reference these developmental differences to argue if separating students according to sex will give a good effect in education.

These are some arguments which can support for premise that single-sex school is good. The first is to decrease distraction in learning. In adolescence stage, males and females are in unstable condition. So, it would be better if single sex is realized. The second is to reduce sexual harassment. In school sometimes there were bullying action including sexual harassment and usually it happens to female. ... ..

Well guys, the statement above are lead for single classes, now how about the team work, solidarity, lacking interaction between males and females? Let we see the opponent side. If the class is separated it will make the gaps between males and females student that can impact to social behaviour of the students. They will have lack interaction between males and females. Beyond the opponents and proponents arguments above, which one do you choose? (Written by Gea, pseudonym)

lowing text.

Applying the model of exposition structure to the text written by Gea above, it can be seen that she has been successful in organizing her argument within the schematic structure as it is commonly understood (Love, 1999; Macken and Horarik, 2002). In the text, paragraph one presents the **Thesis** which introduces the writer's point of view about single sex classes, The topic of separating sex classes is controversial. This also directly shows her "*stance*" or "*position*" and the **Argument** which support the thesis, *e.g.* The first is to decrease distraction in learning. In adolescence stage, males and females are in unstable condition. So, it would be better if single sex is realized

In the text above, it is clearly seen that the writer shows her attempt to persuade the reader that single sex class is an effective way for a good learning to take place. This is in line with the social purpose of the text one of which is "to persuade the reader to think and act in a particular way" (Joyce and Feez, 2000; Unsworth, 2000). The writer's concerns on the issue of single sex classes in the country and her way to persuade the reader through her proposal, indicates her critical insight toward a certain phenomenon in her society and her deliberate determination to her claim (Reichenbach, 2001). In this case, she believed that the single sex classes existing law enforcement can be a potential strategy to enhance learning among students both males and females. Therefore, the implementation of this policy, as she argued, is urgent.

In fact, while it shows some control of the over all generic structure (*e.g. thesis, argument, restatement of the thesis*), this introductory element is not completed with a sentence or a group of sentences which predicts a set of hyper-theme, the opening generalization in a paragraph which predicts the pattern of a clause themes and elaboration (Martin, 1992, p. 437; Coffin,

2000). The absence of this "macro-theme" makes what is to comment in the text unclear and not clearly-planned (Eggins, 1994: 305). In addition, in terms of ideas development, the writer is still unable to organize her ideas well that is proven by her inability to elaborate the topic sentence of the element like in *the first is to decrease distraction in learning. In adolescence stage, males and females are in unstable condition*. In this case, the text could actually be more coherently structured and the fragmentation of some of the writer's arguments could be more easily identified if the writer is able to structure her Point, Elaboration and Reiteration as suggested by Gerrot (1995). In terms of CT, the text makes little use of significant knowledge to support ideas with reasons and credible sources that can promote the writer's arguments credibility (see Norris and Ennis, 1989; Chaffee, 2000; Diestler, 2001, among others).

Students' ability in writing an argumentative text as shown in the case of text one above has been one of the positive impacts of the teaching program in which *Reading to Learn Program* is applied. As data from interview revealed, students' ability to write an argumentative has been influenced by their intensive learning through stages in reading to learn program. According to them, activities in every stage of this teaching program allows them to directly experience writing an argumentative text with a better knowledge on both issues they write and linguistics features characterized a good argumentative text. In other words, this teaching program provides the students opportunities to learn the content, text organization and linguistic features which are crucial in a text creation process.

## 1.2 Teaching Cycle 2

### Preparing before Reading

The text created by students in cycle one as exemplified above urges a more detailed way to build students reading

ability which eventually contributes to their writing ability especially an argumentative text which has been believed as a potential means to improve students' critical thinking (Chaffee, 2000). In this second teaching cycle, the preparing before reading was started by providing students a "watching time" of comedy program downloaded from the internet. Then, in pairs, students decide whether men or women are better at the list provided. They should give real-life examples. Change partners and share their findings. In addition, students still work in pairs, discuss the subjects of jokes in their community. In this activity, the students were required to tell and explain a joke.

The activities illustrated above have been effective in building students' initial knowledge about the topic of the text given which is about comedy. As the data from interview revealed, students' familiarity with a topic on comedy has been enriched through the activities done in this stage. This is surely good in that it prepares students well prior to reading the text activity which ensures them to better understand the text given.

### **Detailed Reading**

In detailed reading, the teacher provides a text for each student. The teacher also asked students to write down some questions they would like to ask the class about the text and share the questions with other classmates / groups. Students were also asked to read the article and choose whether the sentences are true (T) or false (F). In addition, the students were also asked to match the synonyms and phrases from the article.

The activities above were done during the detailed reading stage because most students were not familiar with several terms in the text. Further, it is also found that the text given was not easily understood by the students due to the unfamiliar cul-

tural load implied within the text. All these encouraged the teacher to thoroughly scaffolded the students to understand the text and make sure that each students had the same interpretation upon the text. In other word, detailed reading aims to prepare students in reading the text so that they can comprehensively read and understand what they read. As the interview data show, students' ability to comprehend the text is better with this detailed reading activity which directly indicates the importance of this stage to be conducted in any reading activity.

### **Joint Rewriting**

In this stage, students were asked to write five questions about comedy in the table and when they have finished, they were asked to interview other students or lecturers. After that, they were asked to share and talk about what they have found out, choose a point from the survey result and write an argumentative paragraph from the data and work in pairs and give peer feedback after completing their work.

This activity, as the explanation above suggests, indicate the importance of joint writing to be conducted. This is important to help students get a clear frame of writing a text in English. This joint writing also gives all students equal experience in writing an argumentative text so that each of them can successfully write an argumentative text individually. Through this activity, all students also learn the pattern of sentences that they can use in their writing. In short, joint writing is necessary for students to start writing their argumentative text about the same topic-comedy.

### **Individual Writing**

In individual rewriting stage, all students were required to write an argumentative paragraph about Comedy. This is done in order to check students' under-



standing about the concept of an argumentative text especially related to the

of an argumentative text students; created in this cycle is below.

*Being a Comedian, will You?*

Every one can be a comedian, but a self-inflated sense of humor can be one of biggest roadblock people will encounter when trying to further develop their humor skills and can not seem to figure out why they are not getting the results they want.

Some people think that being a comedian means that they should have naturally sense of funny, beyond on their opinion a better sense of humor cannot be learned, therefore funny cannot be taught. That is a talent that is developed as a result of life influences and experiences. They must have naturally funny which able to generate laughter from others unintentionally when they speak or respond in conversation, regardless of the environment or situation they encounter even when they are not trying to be funny at all. So, this side said that just the people who have naturally sense that can be a best comedian.

In the other hand, some people do believe that every one can be a comedian, because funny can be taught. Based on their opinion, funny is like a knife, means that it can be honed and sharpened for casual conversation, the public speaking arena or for the stand-up comedy stage given the proper guidance and instruction, coupled with some more accurate self-awareness. However, it is possible for virtually anyone to better structure and hone the sense of humor that they do have for better results in virtually any environment, including the performing or speaking stage. Further, by friends, family, co-workers or others that an individual communicates with on a regular basis is the way that can help someone who wants to learn how to be funny and build up the better sense of humor.

However, whether someone is funny or not tends to be a somewhat subjective affair. So, according to you which one is truly way to be a comedian?

The text written by Silvia above discusses a joke as a skill which is naturally given to certain people and gained through exercises for some others. Through this text, she believes that being funny is not only for those having natural talent on it but also for those who are willing to train themselves to be "funny" for being a comedian. In terms of organization, the text created by Silvia has shown some control of the over all generic structure of an expository genre as suggested by theorists (*thesis, argument and restatement of the thesis, recommendation*). Like the text created by Gea given in Cycle one above, this text also starts the thesis ele-

ment with a background as in *Every one can be a comedian, but a self-inflated sense of humor can be one of biggest roadblock people will encounter when trying to further develop their humor skills and can not seem to figure out why they are not getting the results they want*. This use of background element shows her emerging capacity to write an "interesting opening" which directs the reader to the issue being discussed. By providing this introduction or background, the writer has been able to use a "creative thinking" which according to Chaffee (2000), makes the reader eager to read further. This also indicates the students' awareness about the importance of

clarity and depth of arguments given in the text which are part of the CT standards (Chaffee, 2002; Lipman, 2003). The ability to organize the text through those steps mentioned also shows her thinking abilities which are involved in all these steps, helping her to decide which of her creative ideas to include and which to discard. Finally, the presence of a recommendation in the text also suggests the writer's ability in CT which is deciding on an action to do in the future (Ennis and Weir, 1985).

## 2 Students' Response toward the Implementation of Interaction Cycle in Reading to Learn Program

In general, the interview data regarding students' response toward the implementation of Reading to Learn Program revealed two important findings related to effectiveness of the program in building students' knowledge about an argumentative text (purpose and linguistic features of the genre) and teacher's intensive scaffolding in helping the students to improve their writing skill.

First, in terms of students' understanding about the text, it is found that their knowledge about an argumentative text is better than before. As the students said, most of them are now familiar with the generic structure of an argumentative text especially the expository genre (e.g., thesis, argument, restatement of the thesis). Interestingly, the students were also trained to skillfully find out those elements of texts in order to develop their awareness of the importance of those elements in their writing. Further, it is also found that most students were more familiar with the purpose of the text which is to encourage readers to believe in what the writer writes as can be seen in the following statement.

Now I am really know well the generic structure of an argumentative text and its purpose because my teacher explicitly explained them to me. (Lia, pseudonym)

Lia's statement above shows her confidence, at some points, about her knowledge about an argumentative especially the expository genre. In this sense, she believes that explicit teaching done by the teacher helped her more to fully understand the text and its structure. In addition, the statement above also shows Lia's support toward the explicit teaching conducted by the teacher especially in explaining a concept so that students can deeply understand the concept itself. It is through preparing before reading and detailed reading that this activity (explicit teaching) can be done.

The generic structure and the purpose of the text mentioned by the students above is relevant to the theory as mentioned in the literature review section. It is mentioned that exposition has three main generic structure elements; *thesis, arguments and statement of the thesis* (Feez and Joyce, 1998b; Unsworth, 2000, among others). This means that any exposition writing should follow the organization suggested by the theory which, from CT perspective, is also important for the students to show their organization skill (Lipman, 2003).

## Conclusion

This research has shown the positive implication of using Reading to Learn Program as a potential means to develop students' critical reading and writing. Through the five stages of the teaching program including *Preparing before Reading, Detailed Reading, Preparing for Writing, Joint Rewriting* and *Individual Rewriting*, most students find it easier to write a topic deeply and critically. This occurred, as the data from the interview revealed, because the students are well trained in reading critically various texts which directly contributes to their writing. As has been elaborated above, students' writing ability was better since the implementation of this teaching program because the students have wider knowledge about a topic they write, more vocabularies and

sentence as they gained from the process of learning to read, reading to write during the teaching program. From the linguistic perspective, students have been able to show their awareness of using various processes in building the field of knowledge especially material and mental processes which also indicates their awareness to create analytical texts.

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